DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 110 111 JC 750 417

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TITLE Years of Change for Community Colleges: 1970 to 1974.
INSTITUTION Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 5p.
JOURNAL CIT Findings; v2 n2 p5-8 1975

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Cooperative Education; *Educationally Disadvantaged; Individualized Instruction; *Instructional Innovation; *Junior Colleges; Learning Laboratories; *Low Achievers; Peer Teaching; Programed Instruction; *Teaching Methods; Team Teaching
IDENTIFIERS Mastery Learning; Personalized System of Instruction

ABSTRACT

This article compares the findings of two administrations of a questionnaire designed to determine how community colleges were responding in terms of attitudes and methods to the flood of poorly prepared students entering under open admissions policies. The questionnaire was sent to a 20 percent random sample of two-year colleges nationwide; returns of 78 and 84 percent were received in 1970 and 1974, respectively. Tables indicate: (1) the percent of community colleges reporting use of certain instructional methods; (2) the percent ranking specified items as first or second in importance among obstacles to learning for low achievers; and (3) the percent of 1974 respondents stating recent experimental techniques had been used at their college. Results show a predominant trend toward individualized instruction and an increased willingness of teachers to share responsibility for the education of students with fellow teachers, other students, and employers. Dramatic increases were found in the use of pacing methods, programmed instruction, skills centers, team teaching, peer tutoring, and cooperative education programs. However, less than a quarter of the 1974 respondents indicated use of more integrated learning programs, such as the Personalized System of Instruction or mastery learning. Whereas in 1970 there was a tendency to blame the student and his parents for poor achievement, in 1974 most respondents cited poor elementary and secondary schooling as the major cause. (Author/DC)

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ED110111

FINDINGS

ETS • Volume II • Number 2 • 1975

A quarterly of ETS research in postsecondary education

FINDINGS

Published quarterly by
Educational Testing Service
Princeton, NJ 08540

K. Patricia Cross, Editor
Peter B. Mann, Associate Editor
Nancy Beck, Assistant to the Editor

Articles in *Findings* present results of ETS research studies that relate to current issues and trends in postsecondary education. If you would like to receive *Findings* regularly, please send your name, title, address and Zip code to: FINDINGS, ETS, Princeton, NJ 08540. There is no charge.

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1970 to 1974: Years of Change in Community Colleges

K. Patricia Cross

Community colleges have been hailed as models for an egalitarian future offering equal opportunity for all, and they have been damned as the future slums of higher education. While the rhetoric and the research purport to predict their futures, many faculty members and administrators of community colleges have been quietly coping with the realities of open admission policies.

In 1970, I mailed a questionnaire to a random sample of two-year colleges in an effort to determine how they were responding to the flood of poorly prepared students entering their open doors. In 1974, I repeated the survey to see what changes had taken place over the last four years (1). The results indicate that community colleges are making substantial changes in their attitudes toward New Students—the new kinds of students coming through those open doors—and in the programs and services designed for them.

Criticisms of the rigidity of faculties notwithstanding, the most dramatic changes in the community colleges have taken place in the classroom. Faculty, faced daily with growing student diversity and the problems of reorienting "slow" learners, have shown an undeniable willingness to experiment with new methods of instruction. The predominant trend is toward individualized instruction. Self-pacing, programmed instruction, and the use of skills centers have all shown remarkable increases. Self-pacing experienced the greatest growth; its use jumped from 31 percent of the colleges sampled in 1970 to 68 percent in 1974. Programmed instruction, a popular innovation in 1970, moved ahead of its close rival, audiovisual aids, to head the list in 1974. Almost three-quarters of the colleges reported its use.

The other trend shown clearly in Table 1 is the increased

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Table 1

Percent of Community Colleges Reporting Use of Certain Instructional Methods

Method	1970	1974
Team teaching	22	45
Emphasis on audiovisual aids	45	64
Skills centers	36	67
Tutoring by fellow students	36	65
Programmed instruction	44	74
"Guaranteed success" programs	3	11
Practicum accompanies academic work (e.g., cooperative education)	7	32
Gaming or psychodrama	5	8
Materials drawn from black and other ethnic cultures	21	39
"Pacing" methods (emphasis on achievement regardless of time taken)	31	68

Table 2

Percent Ranking Specified Items First or Second in Importance among Obstacles to Learning for Low-Achievers

Item	1970	1974
Low intelligence	7	7
Poor home background	47	37
Poor elementary and secondary schooling	42	49
Lack of effort, have quit trying	49	28
Fear of failure	22	31
More interested in nonacademic matters (car, sports, job, etc.)	16	12
Necessity of a job limits time and energy for study	16	13

willingness of teachers to *share responsibility* for the education of students with fellow teachers, other students, and employers. Peer tutoring, team teaching, and cooperative education all showed large increases from 1970 to 1974. Perhaps we are already into *the learning society*, with many people teaching and learning simultaneously. Clearly, students and employers are helping with the teaching function in community colleges, and apparently teachers are becoming students of pedagogy—if the increased use of new educational methods is any indication.

Greater Use of Innovations Revealed

Perhaps the most persuasive evidence of change in the community colleges is that, while none of the innovations listed in Table 1 was used by even a majority of the colleges sampled in 1970, half were used by two-thirds or more of the colleges sampled in 1974.

It is apparent that remedial education has lost some of its earlier stigma and is now becoming an accepted part of community college education. Remedial instruction—or developmental education—is more likely to be in the hands of faculty specially trained and interested in working with students who have learning problems than it was in 1970. Whereas in 1970 only 50 percent of the teachers had special training, today 61 percent are prepared for work with low-achieving students. Furthermore, remedial courses are less likely to be required (79 percent in 1970, 59 percent today) and more likely to receive degree credit (32 percent in 1970, 53 percent in 1974) or nondegree credit (29 percent then, 42 percent now). There is also an increased willingness to continue financial aid even if the student is on probation (63 percent in 1970, 74 percent today).

Such special services as counseling, financial aid, and recruitment show more moderate increases from 1970 to 1974. In part, the slower rate of growth is due to the fact that most colleges were already offering such services in 1970. It should be remembered that, four years ago, people were largely concerned about access to education. It was widely, if naively, assumed that, if recruitment and financial aid could get New Students to college, counseling could help them remain there. The idea that colleges would have to adapt their instructional programs to the needs and backgrounds of these New Students was slow in coming, but that move is clearly under way now.

One recruitment device is worthy of mention for its healthy increase from 1970 to 1974. Colleges are more likely today to seek the cooperation of community agencies in recruiting students (up from 58 percent in 1970 to 73 percent today). The rate of growth for broad-gauged community recruitment has been twice as fast as that for the

Table 3

Percent of 1974 Respondents Stating a Technique Had Been Used at Their Colleges

Self-paced learning modules	73
Media laboratory	52
Peer counseling	52
Microteaching or similar use of videotape feedback of student performance	27
Simulation games	25
T-groups, sensitivity training, similar small-group sessions	25
Human potential seminars	23
Mastery learning	23
Personalized System of Instruction (PSI)	22
Computer-assisted instruction (CAI)	16
Achievement motivation training	13
Cognitive mapping, cognitive style measurement	10
Internal-external locus of control training	3

narrower approach of visiting high schools and working with school counselors.

Table 2 shows some change in attitude toward low academic achievers. In 1970, there was a tendency to blame the student and his parents for poor achievement. Almost half of the respondents in 1970 observed that lack of effort on the part of the student was the most important obstacle to learning. Today, most respondents find that students are apparently trying harder but schools are not. I have written elsewhere about schools generating a "fear of failure" syndrome for students ranking in the lowest third of the class(2). Although respondents still rank the schools as a major cause for the poor performance of students, they are increasingly likely to recognize "fear of failure" as a significant problem for their students.

It is true, of course, that many people who check "lack of effort" are not blaming the student, but sadly stating a fact. Their students are not motivated to put forth the effort to learn. Nevertheless, the decrease in number of respondents checking "lack of effort," combined with the increase in number checking "fear of failure" as a major obstacle to learning, may indicate a growing sophistication in understanding some underlying causes of poor learning.

Table 3 shows the percentages of colleges using a variety of experimental approaches that have made an appearance in recent years. This item was not included in the 1970 survey; therefore, percentages pertain to 1974 responses

New Publications

□ *A Compendium of Assessment Techniques* by Joan Knapp and Amiel Sharon, prepared for the Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning (CAEL) project and just published by ETS. Available from CAEL/ETS for $3.50.

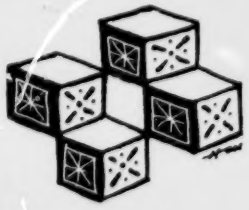
CAEL is a project sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation and aimed at developing, validating, and promoting the use of methods of assessing learning that occurs through experience, usually outside the traditional framework of formal education. The project is being conducted by ETS and a task force of 10 universities and colleges.

This compendium provides introductions to various techniques that can be used to assess "learning by doing" in such off-campus activities as working or participating in social, artistic, political, or cross-cultural affairs. Descriptions of these techniques are brief but adequate to enable readers to decide whether a particular approach is suitable for their own assessment needs.

Although the compendium is not a procedural manual for developing and administering assessment techniques, it does provide information and references for the reader who wants to know more about any of the techniques discussed.

□ *Women, Men and the Doctorate* by John A. Centra, published by ETS late in 1974, reports the results of a survey of 3,700 women and men who earned doctorates in 1950, 1960, or 1968. It compares the views and experiences, including jobs and salaries, of the women with those of their male classmates. Available from ETS for $3.50.

□ *College Placement and Exemption* by Warren Willingham, published in New York by the College Board in 1974, employs ideas from decision theory to describe 12 models of alternate educational treatments for students. The book includes a thorough literature review, and an annotated bibliography by Jane Porter. Available for $6.95 (hard cover) or $4.95 (paperback) from College Entrance Examination Board, Publication Orders, Box 2815, Princeton NJ 08540.



indicating whether the techniques have ever been used at the colleges.

It is interesting to note that, while self-paced learning modules and peer tutoring are both popular methods for working with New Students, the Personalized System of Instruction (PSI)—a sophisticated combination of self-paced learning and peer tutoring—is not well known in community colleges(3). Less than a quarter of the respondents indicated its use.

Mastery Learning Approach Not Widely Used

Another educational concept that received a surprisingly low response is mastery learning; only 23 percent of the colleges reported experience with it. Yet, mastery learning is felt by many to be an especially promising approach for working with students who have not had successful learning experiences in the past. Introduced in the 1920s and revived in the 1960s, mastery learning permits students to spend as much time as necessary to master subject material. Learning any subject well is a new experience for many New Students and boosts their self-esteem and self-confidence. This boost may be even more important than the academic advantages accruing from the assurance that fundamentals have been learned before students are permitted to proceed to the next learning unit(4).

The lack of use of some of the more integrated learning programs, such as PSI and mastery learning, is perhaps an indication that faculty have not yet had time to design total instructional programs for New Students. Rather, the pressure has been to get something together quickly that offers some chance of helping students. Peer tutoring and self-paced learning modules have proved both popular and useful to New Students, but they are techniques rather than programs of learning. Some good and useful techniques have been picked up piecemeal, but they have yet to be worked into an educational program. With some progress in understanding the learning problems of New Students, and with the growing sophistication of the community colleges, perhaps a 1978 survey will show as much progress as the years 1970 to 1974.

Notes

1. Colleges in the 1970 and 1974 samples were not identical; each survey used a 20 percent random sample of two-year colleges listed in the AACJC Directory. Returns of 78 and 84 percent were received in 1970 and 1974, respectively.
2. Cross, K. P. *Beyond the Open Door: New Students to Higher Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1971.
3. For a good discussion of PSI, see: Ruskin, R. S. *The Personalized System of Instruction: An Educational Alternative*. ERIC Higher Education Research Report No. 5. Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1974.
4. For a good discussion of mastery learning, see: Block, J. H. (Ed.). *Mastery Learning: Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.

Volume II • Number 2 • 1975

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